

Tackling sexism and misogyny in policing

Published on 8 August 2023

Behavioural science informs our action plan

News 2 mins read

To help policing address sexism and misogyny, we've used a behavioural science approach. This has involved the systematic examination of:

- what sexism and misogyny look like within policing (who is doing what)
- the influences on these behaviours (what is driving behaviours to occur)

A review of published and unpublished evidence identified more than 220 ways in which sexism and misogyny present in a policing context.

Barriers to behaviour change

The COM-B model says there are three factors that drive how we act. These are:

1. our capability to do something
2. our opportunity to do it
3. our motivation to do it

This model was applied to determine the barriers and enablers to behaviour change in this area. More than 120 barriers and enablers were identified. The key barriers included:

- a lack of knowledge of when to act and the skills to do so
- a culture of internal solidarity creating conditions where those instigating the unacceptable behaviour are protected and those who speak up are seen as disloyal
- the belief there will be negative repercussions after speaking up, including being excluded from the team and damage to career progression
- fear and embarrassment of upsetting others or getting things wrong
- not trusting that reports of sexism and misogyny would be dealt with objectively or lead to a satisfactory outcome

- concerns that confidentiality would not be upheld and a likely loss of control over the process
- everyday sexism being an accepted social norm
- leaders not role-modelling the desired behaviours

Addressing the barriers

In-depth understanding of the barriers and enablers has enabled the development of 12 targeted, multifaceted interventions that should help to change behaviour in this area.

The interventions tap into different mechanisms for change, including immersive training, effective communications, tracking culture in real time, and safe and effective reporting systems.

We are developing and testing these interventions before they are introduced in forces.

For too long everyday sexism has existed in policing, with some colleagues worried about speaking up as either a victim or a witness of sexist behaviour.

I'm really encouraged by work already underway to tackle this across the country but to deliver lasting change that eradicates misogyny from our culture we must work together, follow the evidence and adopt a joined-up science-based approach.

Using behaviour change science in policing to rebuild public trust and confidence is revolutionary and when implemented across all forces I am confident we will see real and lasting change.

We must have our house in order and be free of sexism, misogyny and other discrimination. Only by doing this will we maintain the fabric of policing by consent.

Chief Constable Andy Marsh, College of Policing CEO

- [Read more about the science from UCL's Centre for Behaviour Change](#)

Tags

Violence against women and girls Evidence-based policing